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- Lessons from the Field -

Strategies for Engaging Families to Support Students' Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success

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Transcript

Greta Colombi:

Good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar, Strategies for Engaging Families to Support Students' Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success. On behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, we are pleased to have you with us. In fact, over 2000 folks have registered for today's webinar. This webinar is part of our Lessons from the Field Webinar Series. This series highlights effective tools, techniques, and strategies employed by everyday practitioners to address hot topics on the top of educator's minds.

You can access recorded webinars from the series on the webpage now being shared in the chat. And we'll tell you more about the miniseries in a moment. As always, as you participate, if you have additional strategies that are working for your community, please reach out to Best Practices Clearinghouse at ed.gov to share. After all, our work is stronger together and we all benefit from sharing effective strategies. So please, again, do share. Please note that the content of the presentation does not necessarily represent the policy or views of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does it imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education.

So with that, I want to introduce myself. My name is Greta Colombi. I'm the director of the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, or NCSSLE, and I will be the moderator for today's event. NCSSLE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. And together, we work to build a capacity of state education agencies, districts, and schools to make school climate improvements, foster school safety, and maintain supportive, engaging, and healthy learning environments to empower the success of all students.

To learn more about NCSSLE and to access a range of resources that address school climate and conditions for learning, we encourage you to visit our website. To give you a sense of what the website looks like and what it includes, here we share some of our most popular products on the left, and an image of the homepage on the right. We also share the latest resources and events coming out from the field via social media. So please do follow us. Please note, all materials that you'll see today, including the slides, reference resources, the archive version of the recording, all of that will be available on the event webpage within the website. In fact, some of those resources have already been posted, including the slides and the speaker bios.

Please also note, you can, as I had mentioned before, access previous lessons from the field sessions by visiting our webinar series webpage, which also is listed here and will be posted in the chat. So what do we have planned for today? After we finish up logistics and our welcome or my welcome, we will hear a quick welcome from the U.S. Department of Education, and then jump into the heart of the event. We will start with a quick context setting presentation on strategies schools can use to enhance family engagement. Next, to help understand the importance of those strategies and the power of those strategies, we will listen to a conversation between a practitioner and a family member who had benefited from engaging in schools as she's been raising her three children.

Then we will move into a practitioner panel to hear how schools and districts are creating change as they work to engage families. And then after we get through those three major areas, I'll have some brief closing remarks. And then for those who are interested, we will be having a Q&A. We will be responding to questions that you've submitted via the registration and what has been submitted over the course of the event, and we'll be doing that until 4:30 eastern time.

Please note, the bios for all speakers are included on the event webpage, and we are posting them in the chat right now so you have easy access to them. With that, it's now my pleasure to introduce Cecily Darden, special assistant, focused on family outreach for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. And she's going to officially welcome us to the event.

Cecily Darden:

Greetings, and welcome everyone. And thanks, Greta. I'm thrilled to welcome you to our latest Lessons from the Field Webinar. Today's webinar, Strategies on Engaging Families to Support Students' Emotional, Social, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success, is the third in the miniseries focused on supporting students' social, emotional, behavior, and academic wellbeing and success. The webinars in this miniseries are for the best practices and approaches to support and respond to students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs, including practices designed to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline in schools.

As I reflect on today's topic, Engaging Families for Student Well-Being and Success, in short, I think about the other moms and dads who were like me, who might not have had such rich resources and a supportive community at their ready disposal, and how essential it is for us to connect families to everything that we will learn today. During the previous two webinars in this miniseries and based on resources that the department recently released, we explored guiding principles as well as strategies for school and district leaders to support and respond to students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs.

Today's session is also based on recently released resource, a fact sheet. This fact sheet focuses on strategies for enhancing relationships for families. Within this fact sheet that's available in English and Spanish, you'll find ways to improve communication and collaboration between schools and families to support student needs, also strategies described include engaging families in decision-making processes around student supports, discipline, and school climate, providing family engagement training to all district and school leaders and educators, and establishing family engagement councils.

As Greta shared in her overview of the agenda, this webinar will lift up key points from the fact sheet and bring it to life, as we hear from a parent and practitioners doing this work day in and day out. This webinar reflects ED's ongoing commitment to support family engagement. In addition to this webinar, the department is actively working on a number of initiatives and programs in this area. For example, through Raise the Bar, the department initiative that promotes academic excellence for every learner and better preparing our nation for global competitiveness, ED is committed to supporting families to boost their engagement in their children's education and lift up their voices of parents to support student success.

In fact, the department has engaged in thousands of parents and educators from across the country. In our conversations, we've heard parents saying, "We need more communication, more resources, more opportunities to engage." That's one reason why the department, in partnership with the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Overdeck Family Foundation, conducted the Family Engagement Learning series. In that webinar series, we equipped educators, school and district leaders and community partners with the most promising models for deepening relationships with parents and students. That six-part webinar series highlighted how districts can use the American Rescue Plan's historic 130 billion, with a B, dollar investment in education to support these efforts.

Importantly, the department also supports statewide family engagement centers that help states and districts to implement effective family engagement policies, programs, and activities. We also support nearly a hundred parent training and information centers as well as community parent resource centers. All of these help parents of children with disabilities to participate effectively in their children's education. And through all of this work, we know when we listen to and engage parents and families, there's no limit to what children can achieve.

Following today's session and building off the companion fact sheets released by the department in May, we'll be hosting two additional webinars tailored to specific audiences at the school or district level, including educators and student support teams. Each of these webinars will provide context setting information and practitioner panels. Through this miniseries, we are confident that you will learn key strategies you can implement in your school. And I strongly encourage you or a member of your team to attend each of the, excuse me, each of the webinars and to share what you learned broadly in your schools and communities.

After all, working in partnership, together, we can shift the school climate to keep students in school and address their individual social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs. Thank you again for joining us today. I'll hand it back to you, Greta.

Greta Colombi:

Thank you so much, Cecily. It is wonderful to hear about all the great work the department is doing to support families and educators who engage with them. With that, let's hear about some strategies that schools can use to engage families. So for this context setting presentation, we will hear from Marion Baldwin, senior TA consultant at the American Institutes for Research, someone I've had the pleasure of working with for many years. Marion, can you help set us up with some good information on strategies?

Marion Baldwin:

Yes. Thank you so much Greta for that introduction and the opportunity to share a few strategies that schools can use to enhance relationships with families. I'm truly honored to be here with you today to share this information and to discuss that, for over 50 years, well over 50 years, research has shown that when schools and families build strong relationships, students receive the support necessary to address their social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs.

And it starts really with strong relationships with families. And what do we mean by that? These are relationships that are built on a foundation of mutual trust. They are personal relationships that are grounded in learning and focused on student wellbeing and success. Characteristics of these dynamic relationships also include they're being asset-based, whereby they draw upon the strengths, knowledge and skills of both families and educators. They're culturally responsive and respectful in that they recognize honor and incorporate cultural norms and practices. And these relationships are collaborative and interactive, providing opportunities for educators and families to learn from each other and work together to support all students and the school in being successful.

So how do you establish this mutual trust? Well, it starts with effective communication. And as with any relationship, it requires personal connection and developing mutual understanding. So the first strategy that we looked at was how to improve communication between home and school. And we know that that communication needs to be meaningful and two-way. It's also intended for it to be intentional. And by that, we mean, it's two-way communication that engages participants in listening and responding to confirm

understanding and share information, which is especially helpful if you're having to address disciplinary issues, which we'll talk about a little later in the presentation.

But an example of intentional communication, you can think about it as notifying families immediately when it comes to student disciplinary action and including them in the problem solving and brainstorming of solutions. We also want for the communication to be thoughtful. And there, we're talking about its cultural and linguistic relevance. You want to invite families to share information about their cultures and their primary languages. And you want to celebrate the diversity of your school community. In order to deepen the bond between home and school, you'll want to have authentic and respectful connections one-to-one. You build them one at a time.

These communication are also accessible. They accommodate busy schedules with families preferred methods of communicating. And in today's world, we have so many ways that we communicate with each other, by phone, through formal and informal in-person conferences that can be held at school or in other places within the community including the home. We also have emails to our disposal, text messages, social media. And what you want to do is to know your families, know their children, and know what works best in terms of communicating with your school community. We place a strong emphasis on this two-way communication because it really does enable us to connect and to learn more about each other and build a strong relationship together.

There is no one practice that is going to work in every school or with every family. So you have to always take context into consideration. And there again, I repeat, know your families, know their children, and get them to know you as well. The second strategy that we're going to look at is intentionally implementing family engagement practices. And here, what we know is that we have to build the capacity of both educators and families. Because for ever, a primary reason of why schools and families struggle to build effective family engagement practices has been because neither group has really ever been taught how to do it.

Educators receive minimal training on how to engage families. And I can think back to when I was working on my own master's degree. I had one class throughout all my training that was on family and community engagement. And we didn't call it engagement then. It was just strictly family and community. And so it may not be seen by many educators as an essential practice because it wasn't something that was stressed in their training. And sometimes, educators develop deficit mindsets where they just don't think that the family has anything to contribute.

And that often contributes to why families feel uncomfortable with this engagement, because they have had, sometimes, negative experiences with schools and with educators. They may feel that their contributions to their children's education are not welcome, or they may feel disrespected, unheard, or that they are not valued. And for this reason, ongoing training for families

and professional development for educators is necessary to develop and sustain an effective engagement. Families and educators both must learn what to do and how to do it in order to create an effective family engagement.

And again, I remind you that context matters. From the beginning, you want to be welcoming, you want to bring families in, and you want to build this effective engagement together. One of the things that educators can do is to model effective teaching and share with families how they can replicate lessons at home. That's one way to build families capabilities. And in terms of connections, it's real important that we help families to connect to information and supports that are needed to best serve their children. And these may come in the form of local services within the community, agencies, and other supports that are available through the community and through the district.

And I'm so excited that we will be hearing from our panelists some wonderful examples of how that's actually happening in real time in communities around the U.S. We also want to see educators and families to see each other as partners and allies, and to believe in their own abilities to effectively engage as such on behalf of their students and children. And what we know from the research is that cognition changes our beliefs, and our values change as we work with parents, as we get to know them and they get to know us. We see those shifts happening all the time that really help us to build and intentionally implement practices of family engagement that are effective for helping our students to achieve personal goals.

Families and educators that believe they can engage effectively together are able to connect family engagement to learning and development, and they see families as co-creators. They honor the family's knowledge and understanding of their children, and create welcoming environments that make it safe for families to share. Families engage when this happens as co-creators, supporters, encouragers, monitors, advocates, and models of what effective engagement looks like. And this information is from a resource that you will be able to tap into after this. Many of you may already be very familiar with it. It's the research done by Dr. Karen Mapp and Bergman. And it's the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships (Version 2). So we'll be sure that you're able to get that information.

And then the final strategy that we're going to talk about today is going to be how to improve systems to sustain family engagement. And what we want to do is establish family advisory councils. Give families the ability to provide input to everything that relates to their child's learning and development. You'd be amazed at what you learn from families about how best to support their children. We also want to intentionally embed family engagement in any district and school improvement plans. The principal and the superintendent are literally the leaders here in terms of making certain that family engagement is carried out throughout every facet of a child's education, that we're employing the families as partners and really looking at how it is that we best support every child's learning and development.

We also want to integrate family engagement into onboarding and professional development. When you have new staff to your building, new teachers, new administrators, you really want them to be a part of the family engagement practice that your school and/or district is implementing, and to make sure that they very early on and continually get good information about what is needed to be effective with engaging families. You also need to integrate social-emotional learning into the multi-tiered systems of support so that families can proactively help to address disciplinary issues.

There is literally no parent, no mom for sure, that doesn't really know what sets her child off. And you are having the benefit of that family member as a partner, whether it's a parent, a biological parent, mother or father, or a parent that is a kinship parent, might be a cousin, an older sibling, someone who the child trusts. It may not even be a familial connection. But whenever you involve them in helping you to know that child better and how to address issues when they arise, the better it will be for the child. And then you want to co-develop a system-wide family engagement policies and processes, and you want to be sure when you are doing that that you're doing it with families.

So the next thing that I want to share. When we enhance relationships with families, literally, the school-family partnerships can really bolster students wellbeing and success. It's a win-win for educators and families as well. These are partnerships as you think of them when you think about marriage or business. They literally are relationships where each of you have each other's back, and you're there focused on making certain that the student is receiving what it is that he or she needs to be successful.

And when it comes to discipline and family engagement, there are few things that you want to be sure to do. You want to commit to working together with your families as partners. You want to engage families in shared decision-making and policy development to create a school climate that advances student and school success. As we learned from Dr. Steven Constantino in his Five Simple Principles, Engaging Every Family: Five Simple Principles. That's another resource that we will give you information about how to get that. We want to create standards, shared standards of learning and behavior so that everyone is on the same page knowing what it is that the child needs and understanding what is expected.

The school wants to be sure to share its behavioral and academic expectations with all families. And as important, when those expectations are not met, parents should not be surprised about what the range of consequences could be for those behaviors. So you want to be sure that you provide them with parent handbooks and disciplinary handbooks and codes of conduct, and involve them in developing all of those things. Co-development of the student disciplinary policies. And then as importantly, actionable steps that families can use to reinforce the social, emotional and behavioral goals and practices. And with that, I see that Greta is back on, and we want to get to our panelists. So thank you so much.

Greta Colombi: Thank you. What a helpful framing, Marion. I mean, with all those three major strategies that can help schools build stronger relationships with families, so improving communication between school and home, intentionally implementing family engagement practices, and improving systems that support family engagement. Learn more about what it looks like to improve communication with families and what intentional family engagement can do. Let's now turn to Celia Luviano Vargas and Maria Ethetton. Maria Ethetton met Celia, a mother of three, while working to engage families in Richardson Independent School District, north of Dallas, Texas. And they will engage in a discussion so Celia can share her experiences.

Maria Ethetton for Celia: Good afternoon. It's been an honor that I've been invited to this webinar. I feel very honored. Thank you.

Maria Ethetton: I wanted to ask you, Celia, to tell us a little bit about your experience and how you became engaged in schools.

Maria Ethetton for Celia: First of all, I need to say that my experience is different than a lot of people's. Because first of all, as an immigrant, we have to overcome obstacles. And one of those barriers was the lack of language, of understanding English. So if we want our children to have academic success, we need to consider improving ourselves and educating ourselves first. My road started when my children were very young. There are three of them.

The first experience that I had was when I enrolled myself in the Richardson ISD Family Literacy Center. Where my children participated in the HIPPY program. And the PAT program, the Parents as Teachers program as well. They gave me the opportunity there to educate myself so that I could be the first teacher, see myself as the first teacher of my children. And at that time, my children were very small, very young. They gave us an opportunity. They gave us parenting classes. And that's where they first started talking to us about following our children and ensuring their academic road all the way from kindergarten, elementary school, junior high, high school, and all the way to college.

And this order of ideas and the journey being long that we needed to follow step by step. I started becoming a volunteer when my first child started kindergarten. And next in the elementary school. And in this stage when my children were in elementary school...I realized that there had to be the connection, the school, the parent and the teacher. And that's where, at RISD Academy, I found...The point of reference to involve myself in my children's education and also as part of the community. The first thing was the principal welcoming myself and other parents to begin volunteering at the school. And a very important point in this involvement as volunteers...

It was that we had a parent educator there with us to educate us and help us understand this journey. In this case, that it was myself, Maria Ethetton. And that was the difference, that the district gave us the opportunity to walk with Maria Ethetton. She helped us to have the opportunity to have the different

trainings and strategies to help our children academically. And in this sequence of trainings and ideas... That they provided for us to help educate us.

We walked next to our children, with them, by the hand, to their next level, to their next level of learning. And it was a commitment, a commitment not only to help our own children, but other children in the community. Because we understand, as immigrants, the parents can't always be at school or involved in school. So the parents that can't show their support directly for whatever reason, this group of parents rallied and helped those kids in the community also excel. I recall that in the moment that we became engaged in becoming volunteers... Our children, you could say their self-esteem grew. And the relationship between the parent and the teacher also grows.

Yeah. Because the communication becomes two-way. And therefore, the parents are there, and the teacher can easily access the parent and share with them what it is, what academic support their child happens to be needing in to improve in, and give the parent the tips and strategies so that they can help them. I recall a training that we had. That was from The Concilio. And they talked to us about how our children could make it to the university. We had to follow those steps to ensure that parents were... I'm sorry, to ensure that our children were going to make it to the university.

So when my children, the two older ones, made it to high school... I knew the steps that they needed to take so that I could walk beside them and help them reach their goal. And just like that, at Richardson High School... I found a group of parents, Hispanic parents like me. United parents. And they helped me too to follow those strategies. To help myself help my children. And that's been one of my greatest opportunities to continue to educate myself, and not just myself, but along side-by-side with other parents. And that's the important point here.

And it's not just for a small group of parents, the ones that go to the specific meeting, but it's for the whole community. It's for the whole community of people that speak Spanish. We serve as a point of reference for them to have someone to... As an inspiration. My experience began since my children were young. And like my children have had this opportunity through what we've learned, they've completed their high school and now are in college. And it's true, the journey isn't easy.

Because sometimes, we don't have the tools. And we need those tools. It's important. When we're given the opportunity as parents... To educate ourselves, then we can help our children. That's how her journey began and is continuing. And she had these opportunities, thanks to the Richardson Independent School District. And it's very important as well, when I was at the Family Literacy Center, I had an opportunity to find out that I could pursue classes and complete my GED. And in the same order of ideas, if one educates oneself, one can educate one's children.

When I was a volunteer at RISD Academy... And we helped them so they could take different courses. How to prepare healthy, nutritious meals for our

families. How to take care of our mental health. That was a point of motivation for us, for me. It gave us a place to motivate us, to inspire us, to continue and not give up. And in the opportunity and taking advantage of these courses and this education for ourselves, it helps us transition into positions of leadership. And that gives our children a great example. And we continue to see that growth with our group that we have in high school. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Greta Colombi:

Yes. Thank you so, so very much Celia and Maria for sharing so generously. Reflecting on what Cecily had said earlier, I don't remember if you all had heard it, but how ED knows that when they listen to or when we all listen to and engage with parents and families, that there's no limit to what children can achieve. Celia really shows how true that can be, knowing that your eldest is through college and a music teacher. Right, Celia? And your youngest in middle school. And now you know so much. And we're just so thankful for you for sharing with us today.

Maria Ethetton for Celia: Thank you very much. It's been an honor for her. Thank you.

Greta Colombi:

So as I listened to Maria during the conversation with Celia, I could hear how schools have supported her and other families in her community in engaging families. So let's now turn to our practitioners, including Maria, who are all actively working with families, so we can all hear more about how practitioners can support improving communication between family and home and intentionally implementing family engagement practices, but also that final strategy that Marion had mentioned earlier, which is improving systems that support family engagement.

So if you could all just welcome our practitioner panelists with us. We have Sarah Butcher, Kimberly David, Maria Ethetton again, and Erin Bartlett Lipsker. And please know that all of our speaker bios are available on our event webpage. So welcome, welcome. Nice to see you all. Let's start with talking about strategies. What strategies have you all been using to engage families that support student wellbeing? And how about we start with Kimberly?

Kimberly David:

Hi. Thank you so much for having me here today. So our organization runs afterschool and summer programs throughout our county. And there are really two points that make our family engagement very strong. And the first is we have very strong partnerships with our school districts. They really integrate us into their schools. Our staff are there all the time. And they just really make us a part of that. So it makes us even stronger. We have a lot of school day staff that work for us. And so they're able to engage with these kids during the school day, and then be with them in a smaller setting after school, which really allows for some very strong partnerships and relationships. It takes a lot of work and a lot of trust to begin these schools, but we have amazing school districts here.

The other thing is just really being present with families, really listening to their needs, and just always being there for them. So our staff are out in these communities every day. They're out volunteering, doing things aside from our

organization. And so that gives them an opportunity to really connect with families in another way too. Another thing is that we share a lot of resources with families. So they come to us, maybe they need help paying their power bill, maybe they need mental health services. So although we don't provide those things, we can connect them to those services, and I know that it's very appreciated.

Another thing our staff do continuously, again, with a lot of our community partners is share other resources for families, such as college opportunities for our parents, or food mobiles that are out in the area, a lot of different things. Just always continually sharing resources. Another thing our staff practice is just good communication. Sending notes home, sending messages on our remind app, letting parents know the good things that their students are doing and the good things that are going on in the program. That way when we do, what Marion talked about earlier, when we do have some discipline issues and things, then it's a lot easier when we already have those relationships with families.

We do also a mix of in-person and virtual programming. We know that families have a lot of time constraints, and not everything works for every family. So we found that that's very valuable in connecting with them virtually and in-person. We also do a lot of encouraging family time. We send home family learning kits, such as STEM, cooking activities, scavenger hunts that they can do together. So those are all very important. And again, we have a lot of community partners that help us provide all of this. We also do a lot of family education such as nutrition, resume building, ESL classes, fitness classes and things like that.

So I just want to finish up this question just by reading something one of my staff has shared, which I think is very important about our family engagement. And she's one of our site coordinators. She says, "I believe the more you get to know your families, the more they feel that Project Success is a giant family. I want everyone to feel like they have a place to go and fit in. I want families to feel confident that their child is happy and safe with us. I also work to build fun memories with families because oftentimes, we all get so busy with life that we forget to take a moment and enjoy each other's company."

Greta Colombi:

Thank you so much for sharing, Kimberly. And I love how, when we think about school, we often think of just the school day, and the out of school time is really important, and that partnership with schools is incredibly important. So thank you so much for sharing. So Maria, can you tell us about your Clubhouse Corral? We heard about a lot of other wonderful things happening in Richardson ISD. But we've heard about the Clubhouse Corral. Can you tell us about that?

Maria Ethetton:

Certainly, Greta. Clubhouse Corral is something that came about because we realized we had parents that were not able to attend the activities that were happening at the campus. So we decided to go out and talk with different people that worked at the apartments where we knew we had groups of children that attended. We have a large district. So we believe in every child, every day. And attached to every child is some sort of parent, grandparent,

adult, uncle, someone that is caring for them and also can be supportive for them in their education.

So when we began Clubhouse Corral, we ignited several things. One of those things being a relationship with the people that ran the apartments were gracious enough to loan us a space in their clubhouse. We showed up and brought with us people from our district that were experts in a variety of areas, like things... We looked at things that were most important to communicate to help navigate the school system. What would help parents? We looked at discussing our attendance rules and expectations, and just basically how the calendar and the school system runs here.

Some families, especially our immigrant families, our refugee families, they come from a completely different perspective when it comes to education. And how are they going to know, right? They need to know these things. We also talk about... We brought someone from the Special Student Services to talk about Child Find and how Child Find offers services for, I believe, it's age three to 21, for students or children that have disabilities, and how that could be a help to the parents. Also, we brought someone to talk about Focus Parent, which is something that the parents can use to check the students' grades, to navigate attendance, to upload excuse notes, what excuse notes need to look like. It was something that we also added in there.

They can view test results, and it's something that parents need to know how to navigate to stay in touch with their children's academic journey. We also talked about Parent University. That's something that we put out of the equity, diversity and inclusion office here in Richardson ISD. And that has different focuses. Our focus, for example, last year was about K through second grade literacy. And we gave parents an opportunity to view through what we call our classroom academy, example lessons of how their children are learning in the classroom. And then we also were able to send them videos and sample lessons and strategies that they could try at home with their students to help them also academically and support them. And those are provided virtually.

Greta Colombi:

Wonderful. It seems like you've offered quite a bit through the Clubhouse Corral and more. Thank you so much for sharing. Let's turn to Sarah now. And you've been really actively working on systems change and addressing discipline through family engagement. Can you tell us more about that?

Sarah Butcher:

Sure. Thank you so much for having me today. So Roots of Inclusion, we're located in Washington State. And our work is mainly situated at state level system change efforts. And so we really help state level partners think about what is the infrastructure needed to support districts with these different efforts, discipline being one of them, supporting social emotional wellbeing of students, eliminating restraining isolation, increasing inclusionary practices. Those are just some examples. And so we begin all of our work by first examining the systems that we're trying to impact change in.

And we talk about the fact that every system is perfectly aligned to produce its current outcomes. We don't say systems are broken. They're not. They're doing exactly what they were designed to do. And so how do we build a shared understanding of the system in order to be able to identify what is needed to make the change? And so we use this example of, think of a system as being on a dance floor, right? So if we're down on the dance floor, we're surrounded by people, it's hard to see the whole picture. Our perspective is limited. But if we were to get up on a balcony, that helps us gain some perspective. We can see how people are functioning within that system.

And with others joining us, and in particular, learning from those who are directly impacted by the issue we're trying to understand, we then have the essential perspectives to better understand the problem and identify where challenges lie. And so families and communities are key partners in the work of getting on the balcony so that we can more fully understand the problems that are facing our school communities. And they need to be engaged not only in building that shared understanding of the issue and where the challenges lie, but also in building the shared commitment to the changes that are needed and how we're going to work together in better ways to address it.

So what does this look like in practice? So one of the main strategies we utilize is called a community conversation toolkit. And this toolkit helps to support and empower school and community teams to engage families and communities and it helps amplify the voices of those who are most impacted by the issue. And then it helps to harvest and guides us in harvesting collective wisdom from the diverse perspectives that are included in that community conversation. There's a lot of resources and checklists within the toolkit that are intentionally designed to uphold an equitable and accessible space. And then processes that are designed to ensure we're learning from each other.

And that learning in public piece is really critical. So again, we're building a shared understanding of the changes that are needed. So we currently have a toolkit that's been focused on the inclusionary practices work in Washington state, and we're in the process of finalizing a toolkit on the indicators of belonging. All of those are going to be coming through the new Washington state Family Engagement Center. So really, I would say community conversations are such a valuable strategy to harness the power of relationships. And those actions really show your community that each and every student, and each and every family matters.

Greta Colombi:

Excellent. Thank you so much, Sarah. And I really like our panel has such nice diverse experiences that touch on really important areas to encourage family engagement, whether it's working at the state level, working without a school time, and then working within a district. So that's Erin. Erin, can you tell us the strategies that your district has been using to engage families?

Erin Lipsker:

Absolutely. Thank you again so much for having me. I am just honored every time someone speaks. I'm just honored by their wisdom. Our district is the second-largest district in the state of Washington. Spokane Public Schools is

very large. So one of the things we talk about is how do we meet scale? How do we meet the scale of need for all of our families and our students so that they can be engaged in the process with our staff members and administrators. And so, one of the things that we really focus on is making sure that we have multiple layers of support, multiple layers of options for families to engage. We allow buildings to engage in their unique ways.

But at that district level, we have so many different areas where we can add support. So we have our community engagement boards. We're constantly assessing how can we do things better, what used to be our truancy board. So when families were struggling to have regular attendance for their students, it used to be based in shame and guilt and blame. And now, we're going, "Wait a second. Let's have a community engagement board where we can come together with families, with members of the school community, members from our staff and our team."

I'm so proud to be a part of the Department of Family and Community Engagement where we have so many resources to come around a table and say, "What are the barriers impacting your student from receiving and being able to attend school on a regular basis? How can we help you with those barriers? What do you need from us?" So having that support in place, having native education in place to support our native and indigenous students, having foster care liaison and strong community partnerships are all part of coming together to support from a variety of different ways.

In my role, I get to do restorative practices and mediation. And so that's the opportunity to proactively build and help staff members and family members build strong relationships. And then the reactive piece of when there's harm caused, when relationships may struggle or there's conflict, that I can come in and be a service to say, "How can we repair? How can we come back together with relationship at the core of how we do things?" Our restorative practices is built into our policies. So relationships are key no matter what that is, between staff members, between staff and families. And so we use that for our trainings and for the work that I do. So a lot of different layers of support is how we really try to focus and meet that scale of need.

Greta Colombi:

Thank you so much, Erin. And let's dig into that a little bit more with all of you. We've been hearing about the different strategies that you've been taking and supporting at the state level, district level, what's happening in the school, what's happening in the out of school time. Let's hear just a little bit more. Sarah, can you tell us just a little bit more about creating the systems to meaningfully engage communities?

Sarah Butcher:

Sure. So in all of our work, we utilize and infuse adaptive community leadership strategies. And all of the tools and strategies, all the tools that we develop and the different strategies we use are specifically aligned to support the essential conditions that are part of that Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnership. And so adaptive community leadership strategies, they focus on developing a shared understanding of an issue, challenging the

assumptions people may hold about an issue, adapting to changing circumstances, which happens a lot, especially if you think about a complex issue like supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our youth. And then fostering collaboration. And we believe that it really is in that collaboration and partnership that equity and inclusion live.

And so to develop systems to support the meaningful engagement with families and communities, we help teams think through what is needed to build that point of partnership, right? A table, a space, a team, or a structure where people who are most impacted by an issue partner with people who hold authority in the system to make the change, and they work together to build that shared definition of success. And that shared definition of success is such a really important point because it's only the people who are impacted by an issue that can tell us if the work we do is successful. Right? No one else can tell us if we've been successful.

And so those truly equitable relationships need to be co-created and they need to be co-owned. And there are tools and processes that can help to develop and sustain those relationships. And I think that relationship piece is just a key theme that I think we're all picking up on here today. And so, as systems form these points of partnership and bring together the partners with the shared commitment to addressing a challenge, we really start to see this network effect where collective resources and knowledge and expertise is leveraged to solve a problem. And when that problem is solved in that way, we notice that the change is actually meaningful and lasting.

Greta Colombi:

Wow. Thank you so much, Sarah. So much in there. Let's continue and hear more from Erin. Can you share more about the restorative work you're doing with families and the beloved community trainings?

Erin Lipsker:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, we are all just on the same page, hearing that relationship piece. So with restorative practices, oftentimes, my role would be, whether it's between staff members again, but oftentimes, family and staff members, or family and administrators, where there seems to be conflict, there's harm that's been caused. I think it was Kimberly who touched on that. We have families and people who have experienced generational trauma, their own educational trauma. And so that pain comes in when our children, our loved ones, are then brought to school and they experience harm, and all of a sudden, we're processing our own.

And so my role is really, with restorative practices, is to make sure that I'm giving a voice to families and finding ways that we can bring them back into the fold of community, honoring their voices and their stories and their experience, and helping administrators and staff members understand where they're coming from. That's so important. We've started a new training which you referred to, the Building Bridges To Beloved Community. And our goal is really to have this beloved community where all are honored, all are celebrated and accepted. And the building bridges piece, what we're doing is we're doing this training with staff members in their buildings. How do we have hard

conversations around all kinds of topics, but especially around race and inclusion and diversity and equity?

And then, we're offering that same training for families. So families get access to this incredible information. And then we bring everyone together in our third training to dive deeper into the language, dive deeper into the conversation, and then get together for a meal. We sit around and we share a meal so that we can really say, "Hey, we're in partnership in this. We're all coming together to hopefully build that space of beloved community where all can feel seen and welcome and celebrated and honored."

Greta Colombi:

Wow. That sounds quite powerful, Erin. And Maria, can you tell us more about the impact of the Clubhouse Corral? So there's so much education and information that you're sharing with the parents as you go to the apartment buildings, et cetera. But how do you know that it's making a difference?

Maria Ethetton:

Well, at the Clubhouse Corral, the wonderful thing is that we have that opportunity for the two-way communication, and we're able to really listen to parents that probably wouldn't speak up otherwise in a school environment with so many families. It's a smaller group of parents. And one of the things that we heard several times from different parents was the need for there to be an improvement in customer service at the schools and the way they were treated, the way they were received.

And so we started a training for RISD staff, customer service in our schools based on a book by Jeff Nash, and it's made a wonderful difference. We have had employees that have taken it multiple times. And it's definitely something that came from the direct comments from parents that we met and spoke with at the Clubhouse Corrals.

Greta Colombi:

Wonderful. And Kimberly, can you share a little bit more about the impact of your summer and after school programs, as well as how you partner with schools to help build those relationships with families?

Kimberly David:

Sure. So we have a lot of outcomes to show that our students are improving grades, improving behaviors and things like that. And I know what we're doing with families is powerful, but I think I first started realizing during COVID just how important it is to have these strong partnerships with our school districts. Because we're a smaller program, of course, and we have these close relationships. So there were students sometimes maybe they couldn't reach to get them to do online classes and things like that, and they would go to our staff and say, "Hey, can you go talk to these families?" They're out delivering activity kits and things to the kids.

And so I just really realized how important that was. But some of the impact we see with families and with students is that when we have families in these close relationships, student behaviors improve. Our site coordinators are able to talk with parents and say, "Hey, I noticed something's off with your child. What's going on? Is there something I can help with?" So having those relationships

makes that possible. We have parents tell us that they can work and they can go back to school knowing that their kids are in a safe place where they're getting the educational components after school.

We have parents that come back and become our staff sometimes. We have parents that give back to our organization. So they come to us and say, "Hey, you really helped me when I was in high school and now I'm in a place where I can help you with this project and I want to help." So it's amazing to see those things. And they turn out to be our biggest advocates and really sell our program. When we have funding issues, they're reaching out to legislators on their own. So it's just really exciting to see. And just their gratitude for how much everything improves for their students and their whole family.

Greta Colombi:

Thank you so much, Kimberly. Now we have just one final question for all four of you. What would you say is your biggest lessons learned, or the hope that you have for the future as you proceed with all this important work that you're doing? Erin, would you mind starting with kicking that off?

Erin Lipsker:

There's too many lessons to go for. So I'm going to lean into the hope. I'm going to lean into the hope piece. I think that, my hope would be that every member of the educational community, that is our administrators, our staff members, our families, our students, our bus drivers, our maintenance, our grounds crew, all of those people truly see themselves as an intricate role of how we function and how we grow. That they realize their important role in the circle and in the community of support. And that we each feel supported in that role. That no matter where we're coming from, we feel supported and cared for and nurtured to do the work.

Because this is work. No matter what aspect you're coming from, it's work. And there's conflict and there's all these other things. But if we can feel supported in our role, know how important it is, we are truly making a difference in the future for all of us, not just for our students, but for all of us, for our families to grow and learn and feel cared for and nurtured. And so if all of us can show up as our authentic selves and feel celebrated and loved and cared for and feel an investment in the work, my hope is that we're going to change the trajectory really towards a loving community for everyone. So that would be my hope.

Greta Colombi:

Great. Thank you so much, Erin. That's really motivating. No? How about Kimberly? For you, what's your biggest lesson learned or your hope for the future?

Kimberly David:

I think our biggest lesson learned is that families don't always want to talk about the things they don't feel comfortable with. So years ago, we would plan these big events like budgeting and parent classes, and we realized that things that were termed that way, we weren't having families come to us. So just really talking to them and finding out what they need and finding different ways to integrate the education into our programs, the family education. And it really takes building those relationships to get them to come to the educational

pieces. I think that's probably our biggest lesson is just working with the families and providing what they really need and want.

Greta Colombi: I love that, Kimberly. And I bet that could extend to PTAs or PTO organizations as well for schools. How about Maria?

Maria Ethetton: I would've to say my biggest lesson learned is that, as our communities grow and change, we need to grow and change with them in the terms of family engagement. And we need to learn to meet them where they are, and not just talk to them, rather talk with them and ask them what they need. And like Kimberly said, what we can do to help them or what barriers they're experiencing. I think that's so important. And nothing works as well to build a relationship than listening. Listening to what others have to say is huge. And giving the opportunities for that two-way communication is huge.

Greta Colombi: Excellent. Thank you.

Maria Ethetton: Thank you.

Greta Colombi: And Sarah, the biggest lessons learned or hope for the future?

Sarah Butcher: Yeah, I agree, there's so many lessons. But I think what's coming up for me in this time is just the importance of really listening to our students and families, but in a way where we're really intentional, that we're not just putting, frankly, pain and trauma on display, that we're listening to really understand how these systems are moving around students and families so we start to really identify the gaps and the work that needs to be done. And I think, the other piece I think about is just how do we set ourselves up for success in the work? To Erin's point, this is work. And there can be conflict, there can be challenges.

And so we know that that's going to come up in the type of work and changes we're talking about. So how do we create that holding space, prioritizing the relationships that are needed? We can plan for that. And so I think that that ties into the hope that I have. And I think we've heard a lot of great examples today on how families and communities are engaged at every level of the system by design. And not only in action, but also the value statement of how we fund and resource the work reinforces that value and the importance of that work all the way down to actually how we're implementing different projects or different efforts that are underway.

Our communities are so rich with just the cultural strengths, the ways of knowing, the different assets that exist. And so how we come together and work together in those better ways to address the challenges that are facing our community now, it's just so incredibly important. Right? Because I see a very stressed system in the work I'm doing. And I think, as humans, when we're feeling overwhelmed, we want to stick to the ways we know even if they're not working, because in some ways, it's familiar or it's comforting. And so, one of the antidotes to that overwhelm is that connection and that relationship, that piece that we've heard over and over and over today.

And so that is my hope, that we say we prioritize relationships, but everything by design in the system reinforces the importance of that coupled with all the other work we're doing in education.

Greta Colombi:

That's right. So as we listen, then it's really motivating to actually make the change. So if we're not listening and we're not building those relationships, it's a lot easier to keep doing what we've always been doing. Right? Well, thank you so very much to our panel for a really interesting and engaging conversation of all the different perspectives and the hats that you're all wearing that really contribute to family engagement. With this close of the panel discussion, I'm going to briefly wrap up so that we can jump into a Q&A.

We will pull together the questions that we received through the Q&A in addition to what you had contributed through the registration as I close this up. So looking forward to it. I just want to thank each of our presenters and speakers so much again for the excellent information and strategies and experiences you shared today. This is such an important topic to keep in mind as we continue working to make our school safe and supportive learning environments for all students, for student wellbeing and their success.

We also want to thank you for your active engagement, for all your questions and comments that you've been submitting and all the emoticons that have been floating up the screen. We really do appreciate you being with us. Please remember that you can find additional resources and assistance via NCSSLE and the Best Practices Clearinghouse. In addition to the two upcoming miniseries events that Cecily had mentioned at the start, we also have another human trafficking webinar series event coming up that's going to be focused on recognizing and addressing when students are experiencing labor exploitation.

So again, we greatly appreciate your time today, and thank you for all that you're doing to provide students with safe supportive learning environments. And if you are about to hop out and won't be staying with us for the Q&A, we just really welcome you to provide feedback. You can see on the screen we have a link for that feedback form and it's also in your chat. We really use your information to guide the topics and how we deliver our webinars and are really appreciative of that. All right.

And just remember that all of these resources are available on our event webpage. So with that, let's transition to our Q&A. And I'm just going to pull up the questions we have. And I think our first question is directed to Maria. What specifically do you have to support minority students and undocumented families that are not familiar with available resources and their hesitance?

Maria Ethetton:

We've had parents, an influx of refugee families and students, and one of the things that we did is we used our extended learning department to create a special curriculum for them, designed to help them not only with English as a second language, but also how to navigate, how to grocery shop, how to use public transportation and things of that nature. And that we provided childcare for them while they took those classes, and we had them go to the particular

hotel where they were being housed at the time until they found a place to live. So that was one way that we reached out to them and made this available.

Greta Colombi: Okay. Thank you so much, Maria. We have another question. I think this is for Marion. There was a version two of the family and school partnership model. Where can we find it? And is there anything in particular that you'd like to note about it?

Marion Baldwin: Yes. The citation for that is in the chat now. Sarah Jeffco posted it just a minute ago. You can retrieve it from www.dualcapacity.org. And it really builds upon the knowledge of the first toolkit that was released in 2013. And what they did is they went in and talked with practitioners to find out what improvements they needed to see. And they wanted to show all the success that had been built. As we are hearing from all of our panelists, I'm just sitting here thinking, "Oh yay, this is exactly what they're pointing out." That the stronger those relationships, the better it is for all of the families and the students and the educators. So that is available in the chat.

Greta Colombi: Excellent. Thank you so much, Marion. We have a question for Celia. And the question is, what other tools do you think are still needed to help children of migrant parents succeed in school and life?

Maria Ethetton for Celia: Besides that the parents should actively involve themselves and engage in their children's education... One needs to be aware of the requisites, the prerequisites that are necessary. And be vigilant and access all the opportunities that are given by the school district and by the community in order to help them be successful in higher education. Like in this case, tutoring sessions, summer school... Accelerated courses. And most of all, to have another additional help to learn the language correctly, properly. Because the state exams, they're in English. She thinks that's part of it as well. Thank you.

Greta Colombi: Thank you so very much, Celia. We have another question. Is there a generic survey for parents available that can be customized and built upon that would be helpful to understand their needs? And I'm wondering if we could start with Kimberly, and I'm wondering if Sarah, you might be able to contribute to that too with your toolkit. So Kimberly, if you could start.

Kimberly David: Sure. So this is a toolkit developed for afterschool programs, but I think it could still be a good resource. So AIR offers an online toolkit Beyond The Bell, which has a lot of different forms, excuse me, including student and parent surveys. So that's been very, very useful for us.

Greta Colombi: Excellent.

Sarah Butcher: Yeah. And we don't have a specific survey, but through the toolkit... And there's different tools and elements that are in there. But part of the planning is identifying the questions to ask. And there's a lot of information in there about how to get at that. But I think that any questions that are asked, and I guess a generic survey would give you a place to start, but it's so important that, I think,

those things are tailored as much as they can be to really get at the issues. And sometimes, we can ask questions in strategic ways that it isn't... We want to make sure they're open and clean questions so we aren't driving to specific answers, but rather making sure that we're gathering information.

And often through that process, we find out things that we didn't even know. And that frankly is part of the reason why the community conversation toolkit infused with the adaptive leadership strategies. That is the goal, is to get at a lot of these questions and build a better understanding with families.

Greta Colombi:

Excellent. I thought you would have a great response to that. Thank you so much. We have another question. As a family member, how can they approach schools to establish better partnerships when things have been lacking? Erin, would you like to start?

Erin Lipsker:

Sure. I think that that's so hard. And it makes me sad. Because I think that that proactive piece of relationship building is so important. Because when we have that, when we do that foundational work as buildings and as districts, when we're able to do that, then when something comes up, we know where to go. And families naturally feel like, "Oh, I can go to this person." So if that hasn't been established as a family member, I think that it's so important to find out what resources are available depending on the scale of what's going on.

If the issue is happening within the classroom, being able to talk to a classroom teacher to say, "How can we partner on making sure that my student feels safe and successful in the learning environment here." If it's bigger than just in the classroom, being able to talk to administrators. For us, it's having our department. Most districts, most that I know about, have some opportunity or some avenue to say, "Please share with us your input and insight." We use Let's Talk. So that's on our websites, that's on newsletters, so that families can immediately send a question. And that goes downtown where we can say, "Who's on this? We have hands on deck. Who would be the best person to be involved and to help this family member navigate the system?"

School districts and school systems are huge, and it can be really overwhelming. Even the smallest of school districts can sometimes feel overwhelming. And so finding who your person is to help you navigate that. Maybe it's a school counselor, maybe it's a teacher. Even if it's not the teacher for the grade level your student is currently in, if it's a former teacher where you say, "We had really good rapport and I'm wondering if you could help me navigate the situation and help me figure out who to talk to." Because your voice really matters, your input really matters, your experiences really matter.

And so it's so important that whoever it is that you reach out to, that they welcome you and welcome your feedback and your experience, and that you keep looking if they don't. If you don't feel like you're being heard, you keep asking and you keep saying something's gone on, because you are the number one advocate for your student and everybody should rally around you to support you in that. So I think reaching out to whoever you feel the safest

communicating with, and then going from there and having somebody to just help you navigate that situation because it's so important we hear from you.

Greta Colombi:

Great. Thank you so much, Erin. And Sarah, you were going to...

Sarah Butcher:

Yeah, I'll just quickly... I mean, Erin really covered it well. I would just add from the system piece that, when there's a system change focused effort, I'm going to use inclusion as an example, if we're focusing on that, it's because we know, whether it's as a state or as a district, that there's something hasn't been going well. So we can assume that families and students that there are relationships that have been harmed maybe that are non-existent. And so part of the ongoing work also, I think, at that system level is thinking about what is the ongoing work to start to build, to heal, to repair. It's not so easy.

And a lot of times, we'll see different events and efforts to try to bring people in. But I'm always thinking about who is not there. And is it a barrier to access? What does the outreach need to look like? It takes privilege to show up in spaces. So we need to really understand things that may be in the way of engaging families, and what we need to be doing differently as those in the system rather than just say, "Well, we had an opportunity, they didn't show up. So that's it." So I think it's a complex issue, and it's so important. And there are definitely so many things that families can do and those touchpoints are critical. And as a system, I think there's space there for us to really continue to think and examine on how we do things in better ways when it comes to those healing of relationships.

Greta Colombi:

Well, thank you so much, Sarah. And thank you so much to all of our speakers again today for taking time to present and then answer these questions. We are going to wrap up today's webinar. I think the key messages that I'm hearing are relationships, communication, that it takes work, and that we know that it does make a difference. Hearing from Celia and how she has really benefited from the supports that are available to her have been powerful for her and her kids, and we can all do the same for the families across the country.

So thank you so very much. Again, all of these resources are archived on our event webpage. This recording will be archived tomorrow. And we just want to remind you to complete the feedback form. And with that, I just want to say thank you so very much for joining us today. And I hope that you all have a wonderful rest of your day. Take care.